

Now is my cart out of the slow, pardee!
Lo! brother, quod the feend, what tolde I thee?
Heere may ye se, myn owene deere brother,
The carl spak o thyng, but he thoghte another.
Lat us go forth abouten oure viage;
Heere wyne I nothyng upon cariage.

WHAN that they coomen somewhat
out of towne,
This Somnour to his brother gan
to rowne:
Brother, quod he, heere woneth an
old rebekke,

That hadde almoost as lief to lese hire nekke
As for to yeve a peny of hir good.
I wole han twelf pens, though that she be wood,
Or I wol sompne hire unto oure office,
And yet, God woot, of hire knowe I no vice.
But, for thou kanst nat, as in this contree,
Wyne thy cost, taak heer ensample of me.

¶ This Somnour clappeth at the wydwe gate:
Come out, quod he, thou olde virytrate!
I trowe thou hast som frere or preest with thee.
¶ Who clappeth? seyde this wyf, benedicitee!
God save you, sire! what is youre sweete wille?
¶ I have, quod he, of somonce here a bille;
Up peyne of cursyng, looke that thou be
Tomorn bifore the erchedeknes knee,
Tanswere to the court of certeyn thynges.

¶ Now, Lord, quod she, Crist Jhesu, kyng of
kynges,
So wisly helpe me, as I ne may!
I have been syk, and that ful many a day.
I may nat go so fer, quod she, ne ryde,
But I be deed, so priketh it in my syde.
May I nat axe a libel, sire Somnour,
And answe there, by my procutour
To swich thyng as men wole opposen me?
¶ Yis, quod this Somnour, pay anon, lat se,
Twelf pens to me, and I wol thee acquite.
I shal no profit han therby but lite,
My maister hath the profit, and nat I.
Com of, and lat me ryden hastily;
Yif me twelf pens, I may no lenger tarye.

¶ Twelf pens! quod she, now lady Seinte Marie
So wisly help me out of care and synne,
This wyde world thogh that I sholde wyne,
Ne have I nat twelf pens withinne myn hoold;
Ye knowen wel that I am povre and oold;
Kithe youre almesse on me povre wrecche.
¶ Nay thanne, quod he, the foule feend me fecche,
If I thexuse, though thou shul be spilt!
¶ Allas! quod she, God woot, I have no gilt.
¶ Pay me! quod he, or by the sweete Seinte Anne,
As I wol bere away thy newe panne
for dette, which that thou owest me of old,
Whan that thou madest thyn housbonde coke-
wold,
I payde at hoom for thy correccioun.

¶ Thou lict, quod she, by my savacioun!
Ne was I nevere er now, wydwe ne wyf,
Somoned unto youre court in al my lyf;
Ne nevere I nas but of my body trewe!
Unto the devel blak and rough of hewe

Yeve I thy body and my panne also!
¶ And whan the devel herde hire cursen so
Upon hir knees, he seyde in this manere:
Now, Mabely, myn owene moder deere,
Is this youre wyl in ernest, that ye seye?
¶ The devel, quod she, so fecche hym er he deyde,
And panne and al, but he wol hym repente!
¶ Nay, olde stot! that is nat myn entente,
Quod this Somnour, for to repente me
for anythyng that I have had of thee;
I wolde I hadde thy smok and every clooth!
¶ Now, brother, quod the devel, be nat wrooth:
Thy body and this panne been myne by right.
Thou shalt with me to helle yet tonyght,
Where thou shalt knowen of oure privetee
Moore than a maister of dyvnytee.

¶ And with that word this foule feend hym hente;
Body and soule he with the devel wente
Whereas that Somnours han hir heritage.
And God, that maketh after his ymage
Mankynde, save and gyde us alle and some,
And leve thise Somnours goode men bi come.

WORDYNGES, I koude han toold
yow, quod this frere,
Hadde I had leyser for this Somnour
heere,
After the text of Crist, and Poull,
and John,

And of oure othere doctours many oon,
Swiche peynes that youre hertes myghte agryse,
Albeit so, no tonge may it devyse,
Thogh that I myghte a thousand wynter telle,
The peyne of thilke cursed hous of helle.
But, for to kepe us fro that cursed place,
Waketh, and preyeth Jhesu for his grace
So kepe us fro the temptour Sathanas.
Herke this word, beth war, as in this cas.

¶ The leoun sit in his awayt alway
To sle the innocent, if that he may.
Disposeth ay youre hertes to withstonde
The feend that yow wolde make thral and bonde;
He may nat tempte yow over youre myght,
for Crist wol be youre champion and knyght.
And prayeth that thise Somnours hem repente
Of hir mysdedes, er that the feend hem hente.

Heere endeth the freres Tale.

The prologe of the Somonours Tale.

WHIS Somnour in his sty-
ropes hie stood;
Upon this frere his herte
was so wood,
That lyk an aspen leef he
quook for ire.
¶ Lordynges, quod he, but
o thyng I desire;
I yow biseke that, of youre
curteisye,

Syn ye han herd this false frere lye,
As suffereth me I may my tale telle!
¶ This frere bosteth that he knoweth helle,
And God it woot, that it is litel wonder;
freres and feendes been but lyte asonder.

for, pardee! ye han ofte tyme herd telle,
How that a frere raysshed was to helle
In spirit ones by a visoun;
And as an angel ladde hym up and down
To shewen hym the peynes that ther were,
In al the place saugh he nat a frere;
Of oother folk he saugh ynowe in wo.
Unto this angel spak the frere tho:
¶ Now, sire, quod he, han freres swich a grace
That noon of hem shal come to this place?
¶ Yis, quod this angel, many a milloun.
And unto Sathanas he ladde hym down.
¶ And now hath Sathanas, seith he, a tayl,
Brodder than of a carryk is the sayl.
Hold up thy tayl, thou Sathanas! quod he,
Shewe forth thyn ers, and lat the frere se
Where is the nest of freres in this place!
¶ And, er than half a furlong, wey of space,

Heere bigynneth the Somonour his Tale.

WORDYNGES, ther is in
Yorshshire, as I gesse,
A mersshy contree
called Holdernesse,
In which ther went a
lymytour aboute,
To preche, and eek to
begge, it is no doute.
And so bifel, that on a
day this frere
hadde preched at a chirche in his manere,
And specially, aboven every thyng,
Excited he the peple in his prechyng
To trentals, and to yeve for Goddes sake,
Wherwith men myghte hooly houses make,
Cher as divine servyce is honoured,
Nat ther as it is wasted and devoured,
Ne ther it nedeth nat for to be yeve,
As to possessioners, that mowen lyve,
Chanked be God! in wele and habundaunce.
¶ Trentals, seyde he, deliveren fro penaunce
hir freendes soules, as wel olde as yonge,
Ye, whan that they been hastily ysonge;
Nat for to holde a preest joly and gay,
He syngeth nat but o masse in a day.
Delivereth out, quod he, anon the soules;
Ful hard it is, with flesschhook or with oules
To been yclawed, or to brenne, or bake;
Now spede yow hastily, for Cristes sake.
¶ And whan this frere had seyde al his entente,
With Qui cum patre forth his wey he wente.
¶ Whan folk in chirche had yeve him what
hem leste,
He went his wey, no lenger wolde he reste.
With scrippe and tipped staf, ytukked hie,
In every hous he gan to poure and pryde,
And beggeth mele, and chese, or elles corn.
His felawe hadde a staf tipped with horn,
A peyre of tables al of yvory,
And a poyntel pollysshed fetisly,
And wroote the names alwey, as he stood,
Of alle folk that yaf hym any good,

Right so as bees out swarmen from an hyve,
Out of the develes ers ther gonne dryve
Twenty thousand freres in a route,
And thurghout helle swarmeden aboute,
And comen agayn as faste as they may gon,
And in his ers they crepten everychon;
He clapte his tayl agayn, and lay ful stille.
This frere, whan he looked hadde his fille
Upon the torments of this sory place,
His spirit God restored of his grace
Unto his body agayn, and he awook;
But natheles, for fere yet he quook,
So was the develes ers ay in his mynde;
That is his heritage of verray kynde.
God save yow alle, save this cursed frere!
My prologe wol I ende in this manere.

Heere endeth the prologe of the Somonours
Tale.

Ascaunces that he wolde for hem preye.
¶ Yif us a busschel whete, malt, or reye,
A Goddes kechyl, or a tryp of chese,
Or elles what yow lyst, we may nat chese;
A Goddes halfpeny, or a masse peny,
Or yif us of youre brawn, if ye have eny;
A dagoun of youre blanket, leewe dame,
Oure suster deere, lo! heere I write youre
name;

Bacoun or beef, or swich thyng as ye fynde.
¶ A sturdy harlot wente ay hem bihynde,
That was hir hostes man, and bar a sak,
And what men yaf hem, leyde it on his bak.
And whan that he was out at dore anon,
He planed away the names everichon
That he biforn had writen in his tables;
He served hem with nyfles and with fables.
¶ Nay! ther thou lict, thou Somnour! quod
the frere.

¶ Dees! quod oure hoost, for Cristes
mooder deere;
Tel forth thy tale and spare it nat at al.
¶ So thryve I, quod this Somnour, so I
shal.
So longe he wente hous by hous, til he
Cam til an hous ther he was wont to be
Refreshed moore than in an hundred placis.
Syk lay the goode man, whos that the place is;
Bedrede upon a couche lowe he lay.

¶ Deus hic! quod he, O Thomas, freend,
good day,
Seyde this frere, curteisly and softe.
Thomas, quod he, God yelde yow! ful ofte
Have I upon this bench faren ful weel,
Heere have I eten many a myrie meel.
¶ And fro the bench he droof away the cat,
And leyde adoun his potente and his hat,
And eek his scrippe, and sette hym softe
adoun.

His felawe was go walked into toun,
forth with his knave, into that hostelrye
Wheras he shoop hym thilke nyght to lye.